

Matthew 5:38-48
Blind, Toothless and Unloved?
February 19, 2017

These are some of the most challenging and well known scriptures in the New Testament. In them Jesus is showing us how to NOT be surrounded by blind, toothless and unloved people by giving up our rights to our lives on behalf of others. Jesus is challenging us to take our relationships to a higher level.

Now we have heard these scriptures all our lives and I believe have become blind and deaf to their meaning. They are so easy to give lip service to and not live out. If we live them out in many instances they will destroy our comfortable lives. They will cost us our all.

This is because they are so opposite of what the world teaches **“Eye for eye, destructive lawsuits, coercion, outlawing the beggars, being stingy with our money.”** You know, if we follow Jesus it just might cost us everything here on earth. We just might have to pick up our cross and die to our comfortable lives to follow him.

To quote one young man, “Jesus ruined my life!” I once was the most popular guy on campus. I was homecoming king. I played football. I had all the girls I wanted, and then I became a Christian. Jesus ruined my happy, hedonistic life.

The story is told about an old man who came forward to speak one evening at a prayer meeting. He was in his late 80s, bent over, limping, nearly blind and deaf, with many teeth missing. He came to the microphone and began to speak with the raspy voice of age. People leaned forward with great anticipation to hear the wisdom of his many years. He said just one sentence, “Jesus darn near ruint’ me!”

In terms of the world we are often seen as fools; our faith ruining us and our future. Do not resist an evildoer? Turn the other cheek for another blow? Give away your cloak and coat and wind up naked? Submit to coercion? Give and lend without expectation of return? Love my enemies? Pray for my persecutors? Dear God, I will be ruined!

Yep, maybe ruined for this life, but granted eternal life and maybe even a better life here on earth a life with purpose.

I need to explain some of these verses. The “eye for and eye and tooth for a tooth” law is actually called the “Lex Talionis.” It was an ancient law that can be seen in many cultures going back over 4000 years. It was part of God’s natural law given too many cultures to limit some of the unbridled revenge and savagery of tribalism.

In tribal cultures, before this law was put into place, if you poked out my eye, I gathered my people and we poked out both your eyes, killed you, killed your wife and children and took all your animals away, which instilled even a more savage response in revenge by his tribe.

Lex Talionis should be seen as “(only) an eye for an eye and (only) a tooth for a tooth.” It limited revenge. It was also not for people to exercise on a personal level. It was a law to be adjudicated by a court. It was not to exercise personal revenge, but for the court to seek justice. It was also found in ancient records that lots of injuries were settled, not with a similar injury, but with a monetary fine. To cause injury was to create debt and debts had to be paid, or forgiven. “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” as Jesus would say.

In Jesus saying, “Do not resist an evildoer” he was absolutely eliminating personal revenge for a Christian, but also saying give up your rights to revenge and injury in court.

But Jesus’ teaching is much shrewder then we think, though, on a casual reading of this text. Jesus lists three common injustices the common poor people listening to him would often endure.

First, “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;” Jesus is very much preparing us to take another blow, but in that day and age the first blow was backhanded. It is what a superior gave to and inferior. The return blow if there was one would be with the flat of the open hand.

But for a superior to hit someone else in such a manor with an open hand would be saying that person was equal to you. So if you turned the other cheek the blow would often not come. And if it did come the moral victory was there of socially elevating the stricken person to that of the hitter.

“If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.” Again, this is a poor person being sued in a court of law, who only has two possessions in life. An outer coat or robe they would work in during the day and sleep in at night, and an undergarment called a “cloak”.

The image is in that court of law, the poor person in an act of seeming generosity and conciliation gives all he has, but you know what? If he does that he is left standing there naked, and no one wants to see that in a court of law. It was one way to walk out of court with both cloak and coat by embarrassing the one who took you there. But the possibility still existed you might leave naked.

And **“if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”** By Roman law the occupying Romans could force anyone to carry their burdens for one mile. It was illegal for them to require more than one; so Jesus was saying again, you can offer two miles with the thought of the Roman turning you down for fear of them getting into trouble. But again, be ready to go that extra mile.

“Give to everyone who begs from you and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” Straight forward teaching on what it means to be a Christian taking care of beggars and borrowers. For the last 35 years I have been helping people out financially through the church. That’s what the Good Samaritan fund here is for. Most say they want the money as a loan they say they will pay back. In all those years, only two people, much to my surprise, paid the church back.

So, I always tell people I help that the money is a gift. If you ever can pay it back give it to the church to help another. And I also know this, if you want some people to disappear from your life, just loan them money.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘**You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.**’ But I say to you, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**” This is not a clever teaching of Jesus; but straight forward, scary and hard. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Not what the world does, but what Christians, little Christs, People of the Cross do.

Last week I said this, “**Forgiveness like love is an act of the will.** Anger is also a choice and act of the will. In this giddy, emotional week of Valentine’s Day we forget that love, true love is an act of the will. It is a commitment to someone. It is the same with forgiveness and reconciliation. We must decide to do it, than do it. We must decide to not harbor and nurse our angers and hurts, but let them go.”

Love is a choice. It is an act of the will and not an emotion. Here Jesus is speaking of “**Agape**” love. **It is a Godlike love.** “it means a determination of the mind, whereby we achieve unconquerable goodwill even to those who hurt and injure us. Agape...is the power to love those whom we do not like, and who may not like us. “...we can only have agape when Jesus Christ enables us to conquer our natural tendency to anger and bitterness,...” Barclay Mt. Vol. 1 p. 201

And the purpose of this is so that we might be like God. That is what the phrase “**so that you may be children of your Father in heaven**” means. We try to be disciples, which means, we try to be like Jesus, who is like God. And the goodness of God, the rain and the sunshine is poured out on all people, the good and the evil.



God’s love is poured out on all with the hope that they would see and turn to him. In fact that is part of our purpose, our perfection here on earth to witness and help people turn to God.

We are called to be different in this world, more than those of this world. **We are called to be more loving, more forgiving, more giving than those who just subscribe to Lex Talionis.**

We are called not to ignore evil and do nothing, but **be ready to pay the price to prove God's love.** God's justice sometime is meted out in this world, but will come in fullness in the world to come. There will be a final judgement where all will be held accountable to their sin here on earth unless they have received the gift of the death of God's son.

Now this scripture ends with one of the most discouraging demands **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** Unless you understand it. The word **"perfection"** here holds the idea of **"fulfillment"**. It holds the idea of fulfilling your purpose.

It holds the idea of seeking to love others and love God as God loves us. It is a journey. It is a struggle. It is turning the other cheek, giving up all in the face of injustice, it is going the 2nd mile, it is being begged and borrowed from. It is loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. **It is done only through deep courageous commitment and prayer!**

5 years ago I was talking with a pastor who as a young man worked in Rev. Martin Luther King Jr's inner circle. He spoke of a time in which it seemed like King's nonviolent approach was going nowhere. He was being pressured by all in his inner circle to turn to violence.



Martin Luther King after listening to that for a while excused himself to go to his prayer closet. He spent a considerable amount of time praying and when he emerged he still said no to violence. As you know Rev. King eventually paid for his faithful stance with his life, which is the warning that Jesus gives to all who would follow him.

When we follow Christ we become part of another reality. (Repeat)
We become part of the Kingdom of God and begin to view all of humanity as God does. God loves all.

To follow Jesus it seems we must violate the rules of “common sense” of this world. We are following, though, the rules of the Kingdom of God, the evidence of it in this world being that the sun rises on the evil and the good and the good rain falls on the just and unjust.

We as we become more and more a part of the Kingdom of God we love as God loves; and our neighbor, our relative, our friend become anyone who is in need. We, as we grow in the Spirit, and in grace we become more and more like God. We become more set free to love our neighbor.



On the screen now is a young woman named Lori Jensen. She was raised a Methodist. I met her through her mom at FUMC of Mesa. She has given up all to follow Jesus and love her/our enemies. She ministers as a lay person in the Mideast.

She currently is in Oman. She learned Arabic to witness to the Arabs. She was certified to teach English to secure a position to forward her ministry. She gave up being married and having children to follow Christ. There are others, many others like her. They love the enemy and pray for the persecuted.

We as United Methodist through your giving minister in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and other very dangerous places for People of the Cross or Nazarenes as Isis calls us. We seek to support Christians from those troubled places.



They need our prayers. They need our support and my challenge to someone gathered here today in this room is to seek out, study what we can do. Lori needs financial help and I have helped her personally in the past.

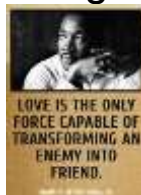
But I want to show you now one of the most challenging and moving video clips I have seen. It was produced with the help of Coptic Christians from Egypt, Arab Christians and Middle East Refugees.

It truly shows us what it means to be Godlike, to be a part of the Kingdom, to be perfected in love, to fulfill one's purpose as a martyr, a witness in our modern world, to be like Jesus.

When the Iraq war began there were about 1.5 million Christians in Iraq. Today, there are about 100,000 if that many. Would you dare to love Isis?

ROLL Who Would Dare to Love ISIS? (Cut before slide "Mighty.Ia)

The amazing thing is that today, unprecedented numbers of Muslims in the Mideast are converting to Christianity.



What is God saying to you? And what are you going to do?

In Jesus' name amen.